

# ALABAMA'S HEALTH

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## WIDESPREAD COVID-19 VACCINE UPTAKE PROVIDES PATHWAY TO RECOVERY FROM HISTORIC PANDEMIC

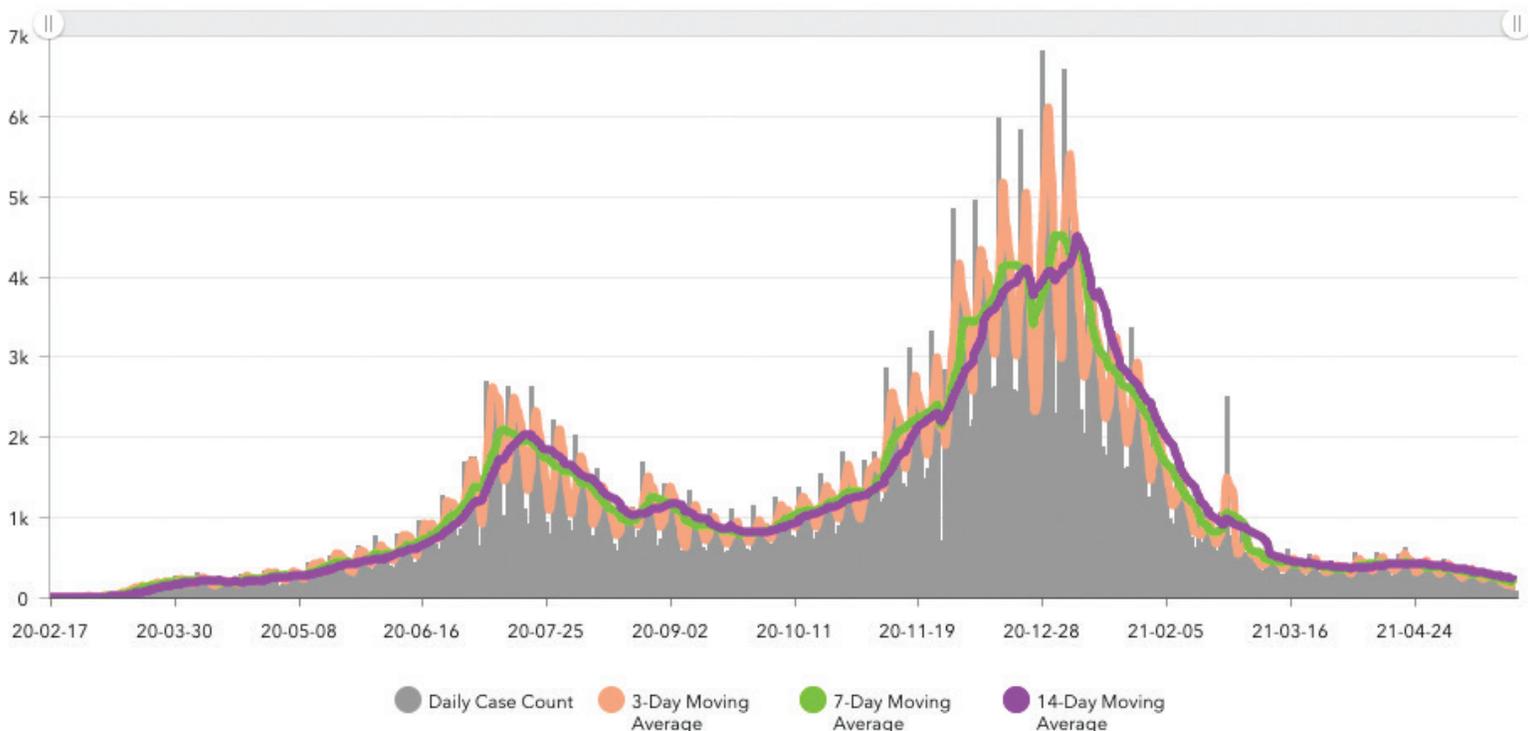
Vaccines are protecting many Alabamians from COVID-19, a virus which has resulted in the deaths of more than 11,000 state residents since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. More than 1.6 million state residents are fully vaccinated, including about 70 percent of the vulnerable group of people age 65 and older, but many challenges remain as Alabama is among the U.S. states with the lowest vaccination rates.

COVID-19 has brought public health into a spotlight like never before. Looking back, these are some of the department's milestone events of 2021 in combating the largest disease outbreak in most people's lifetimes.

In January, there were many dark days following a holiday surge. Despite the high death rate from COVID in 2020, the greatest daily number of deaths in the pandemic occurred in January. Prioritization for vaccine was based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance which took into consideration vaccine availability and its limited supply. After vaccinating healthcare workers and others most at risk, including vulnerable nursing home residents and staff, vaccine appointments were opened to Alabamians 75 years and older and first responders (including law enforcement and firefighters) statewide.

*continued on page 3*

### Daily Number and Moving Averages of COVID-19 Cases by Date of Report (Statewide)



*The department's dashboard illustrates the dramatic decreases in numbers of COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began. Thanks to staff, COVID-19 dashboards have become an important communication tool in sharing data with the public.*

# AS A MOTHER AND DOCTOR, DR. KAREN LANDERS DEDICATES HER LIFE TO WELLNESS OF ALABAMIANS

by: Erin Dunbar, Shevaun Bryan, WHNT News 19, Huntsville

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. – Dr. Karen Landers with the Alabama Department of Public Health became one of the most well-known faces in the state during the pandemic.

With decades of experience as a physician, Dr. Landers dedicated her life to the wellness of Alabamians.

Dr. Landers is one of News 19's four Remarkable Women nominees.

"I really have been a doctor all my life. It's the only thing I know," said Dr. Karen Landers.

From a childhood in Knoxville, Tennessee, to Birmingham where she went to medical school, Dr. Karen Landers has a career riddled with accomplishments and fueled with a passion that started as a result of her own illness when she was eight-years-old.

"I actually was quite ill. I had pneumonia, had a seizure and I was in the hospital for several days. So that inspired me, I still remember getting a chest X-ray thinking that I would become a doctor," said Dr. Landers.

Landers is a mother of two and a pediatrician. She has extensive training in Tuberculosis and infection control that has led to multiple awards and taken her around the state, the country, and the world in the name of health.

"I worked a little bit in Central America and had the opportunity to really focus on TB in the Marshall Islands," said Landers.

She has worked through Ebola, H1N1, Zika, but says COVID-19 came about at a time when she was seeking a change of pace.

Landers said, "I was going to retire in April but after this came along, I thought I've never deserted my post in a crisis and didn't want to desert my post in a crisis. I stayed on to try to do what I

could to help my department because the mission of the ADPH is to protect and promote the health of the citizens of Alabama."

She unexpectedly became one of the faces and voices of Alabama's ongoing fight with the pandemic. She joked that she's tired of seeing herself on television but with her career, knows the importance of the work being done even in the face of intense criticism.

"Recognize that at the end of the day with that criticism comes growth, also empathy and understanding of where people are. I've had some pretty bad things said to me during this pandemic," Landers said.

And being the caregiver that she took an oath to be, she takes those harsh words with others in mind.

"If that's a way that a person feels... they can ventilate. If that helps them to be able to say something, regardless of how offensive I may find that to be, but if that helps them to deal with their feelings or their thoughts or even some sense of loss of their own day-to-day lifestyle, then that's ok. If that helps them then I can take this, I should be able to take it."

She has spoken with thousands of COVID patients.

Landers said, "I just really to be an ear to listen to people who had no other source of medical care, that was very rewarding to me."

Knowing she entered the world of medicine before it was as common to see a female doctor – she hopes other women know that chasing dreams while balancing family is possible.

But for now, she aims to do her part to eradicate this pandemic that affects us all because there's work to be done.

"We're making a choice to come here everyday. We've been here many years, we can leave but we're making a choice because we are making a difference," said Landers.

## Alabama Department of Public Health

### Mission

To promote, protect, and improve  
Alabama's health.

### Vision

Healthy People. Healthy Communities.  
Healthy Alabama.

### Core Values

Excellence, Integrity, Innovation, and Community.

## Alabama's Health

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## Vaccine, continued from page 1

Once the availability of vaccine appointments was announced, there was an immediate and massive surge of phone calls to the COVID-19 scheduling hotline. The line received over 338,000 calls within the first few hours of operation and 1.1 million calls in its first day. Patience was urged due to the high demand and low supply.

To assist county health departments with vaccine clinics, ADPH employees were redirected from their existing duties. For example, on January 18 local health departments conducted 62 immunization clinics and a total of 14,312 vaccinations were administered. County health departments administered all inventory of vaccine each week until no vaccine remained. With an understanding that some smaller rural counties might not be able to give vaccine at that volume, the department partnered with community providers to get vaccine out to the public rapidly. ADPH surveyed all providers in the state to ensure that all administered doses had been properly reported and to determine whether there was any available vaccine that needed to be redistributed elsewhere.

In February, an online portal was launched for individuals to check their eligibility for vaccination and make appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations at county health departments. The portal also was set up to provide up-to-date information about additional drive-through and walk-in clinics being offered. By entering information in the portal, individuals confirmed their eligibility, selected a county where they intended to schedule their vaccination, and indicated if they wanted to be notified if interested in receiving an e-mail notification when the vaccine became available for additional priority groups. Information about the vaccine product itself and what to expect was also provided. Links were established to click to view a complete list of vaccine providers in the state and other information on the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Dashboard.

Dangerous ice and snow in February did not deter the Northern Public Health District's efforts to vaccinate. The Morgan County Health Department staff was determined to catch up on scheduled vaccinations that had to be postponed to weekends due to ice storms. On February 17 alone, staff in Morgan County vaccinated 915 people. District Administrator Judy Smith wrote that eligible local people who had scheduled appointments did not want to miss or delay "their dose," so staff throughout the district "shined beyond belief," especially in Morgan and Madison counties, to accommodate demand for vaccine.

During March, a poll to better understand reluctance to take the COVID-19 vaccine among African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos and Tribal Nations was conducted by the Bruno Event Team for the department. Results included a belief that state residents have great respect for the opinions of leaders in the world of sports -- football, basketball and other sporting events. A federal grant funded the poll of 1,000 individuals which helped inform messaging for these vulnerable populations and others.

Beginning March 22, ADPH extended eligibility for COVID-19 vaccinations to include people age 55 and older, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the population defined as Allocation Phase 1c in the Alabama Vaccine Allocation Plan. Groups included for extended eligibility were people age 16 to 64 with high-risk medical conditions which included but were not limited to the following conditions: Cancer, chronic kidney disease, COPD, heart conditions such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies; immunocompromised state, solid organ transplant, obesity, BMI greater than 30; pregnancy, sickle cell disease, smoking, Type 1 and 2 diabetes; and other medical conditions as determined by a person's medical provider. Other critical workers also became eligible. Massive drive-through clinics with long lines were held in locations throughout the state.

Ensuring vaccine equity for vulnerable people without access to care was addressed by holding Alabama National Guard mobile clinics in 24 counties having a high social vulnerability index. Two teams staffed the clinics in the Black Belt and Wiregrass regions. Beginning April 5, eligibility for COVID-19 vaccinations was extended to include individuals age 16 and older, with the Pfizer vaccine available to individuals age 16 and up, and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines both available to individuals 18 years of age and older. On April 8, a record high number of 44,258 vaccine doses were administered.

A pause in administering the Johnson & Johnson vaccines vaccine was taken for the 329 Alabama healthcare providers who had received it, only about one-third of providers statewide, to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots associated with the vaccine. Federal health officials lifted an 11-day pause on its use following a review and expert recommendation that determined it met safety standards. While COVID-19 cases and deaths decreased dramatically, testing has declined by two-thirds.

In May, some walk-in clinics in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods were offered. Home health agencies expanded to at-home vaccinations for those unable to leave their residences or with inadequate transportation. Formerly, this was not possible because of the need to preserve every single dose of vaccine due to cold-chain requirements. The Pfizer BioNTech vaccine was authorized for adolescents beginning at age 12.

Impressive new allies including legendary Alabamians Coach Nick Saban of the University of Alabama and other celebrities who have the ability to influence others are encouraging Alabamians to take the vaccine. Public service announcements are airing statewide on broadcast, cable and digital media.

Initiatives such as a special event held at Talladega Superspeedway on May 15 promoted vaccination, especially among some vaccine-hesitant young men. With the end of mandated facial coverings and social distancing, the public has been reminded to continue to observe safety protocols when around vulnerable people and those whose vaccination status is unknown.

# DRIVE-THROUGH CLINICS SUCCEED IN VACCINATING THOUSANDS

In a collaborative event with the City of Montgomery, Montgomery Fire/Rescue, Montgomery Emergency Management Agency, the Montgomery Police Department, the East Central Public Health District, and the Central Office, 1,100 COVID-19 vaccinations were given on January 30. First responders, healthcare workers, and citizens age 75 and older became eligible, and some slept in their cars to secure their places in line. Three bays of Montgomery Fire/Rescue's Fire Station #9 were arranged to efficiently vaccinate recipients in their vehicles and direct them to park in a recovery area for monitoring.



*Tim Hatch and Beth Wells of the East Central Public Health District staff a mass vaccination clinic in February in Montgomery*



*Sandra Blakely walks vehicle to vehicle to ensure people in the queue have the educational materials and necessary COVID-19 vaccine consent forms completed before reaching the vaccination area.*



*ADPH nurses carefully prepare syringes for injecting vaccine at the mass clinic in Montgomery.*



*Data entry of the vaccination forms into ImmPRINT is an essential function of the team at the Saturday mass clinic.*

# PROPER COVID-19 VACCINE STORAGE AND HANDLING CRITICAL

Receiving, storing, distributing, and tracking COVID-19 vaccine and supplies is essential. Special attention is paid to maintaining proper vaccine temperatures.



*Photo by Kenneth Blakely*

# PROJECT HOPE DONATES PALLETS OF PPE

In March, Ken Reid, director of Operations at the Center for Emergency Preparedness, learned about a most generous offer to donate personal protective equipment to the department, so he quickly responded that he would check the department's warehouse space and soon agreed to welcome the donation. Not only were gowns and protective suits being given to the department, the PPE was shipped at no charge. A total of 27 pallets of yellow disposable isolation gowns and 80 boxes of protective suits were sent to the warehouse for distribution to Alabama healthcare providers.



# COVID-19 TESTING MEANS DONNING PPE

Personal protective equipment including a fit-tested face mask helps Nurse Practitioner Lacey Mixon of the Houston County Health Department safely collect COVID-19 specimens from symptomatic people.. She is shown with Southeastern District Assistant Administrator Kyle Odom at a testing site in Abbeville in April.



# FACE MASKS 2021

Correct and consistent face mask use is one action that can prevent getting and spreading COVID-19. To help employees keep safe and healthy, the Alabama Public Health Association (ALPHA) provided face masks to all public health employees. Data Manager Stuart Hoyle with the Alabama Violent Death Reporting System, Bureau of Prevention, Promotion, and Support, is shown modeling the mask that features the ADPH seal and ALPHA logos on either side. With new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, wearing face masks became optional for most fully vaccinated staff members effective May 17. Exceptions are those employees providing direct face-to-face patient care or performing duties in healthcare facilities or congregate living facilities. In making the emailed announcement, State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris wrote; "The progress that we are seeing today is due in large part to the heroic efforts of our ADPH team over the last year. Thanks again to everyone for all you do!"



# SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT EMPLOYEES FIND COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE INTENSE YET REWARDING - TEAMWORK AND CAMARADERIE KEY

The COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges to everyone in the year 2020, and for public health employees the scope and duration of the challenges have been unparalleled. Employees stepped up to do whatever was needed to help fight the pandemic and mitigate the effects of the largest outbreak of a single disease in more than a century.

Corey Kirkland, Administrator of the Southeastern Public Health District, said he couldn't be happier with the effort district and county employees have shown and who have provided great service and professionalism during the pandemic. He said, "They came in early, worked through the heat, and left work late many days. That same effort was multiplied many times over when we started giving vaccines in January."

Small county health departments with limited numbers of staff pulled together as the only COVID-19 vaccine providers and delivered thousands of doses to their citizens, Kirkland said.

In reflecting on the past 14 months, Kyle Odom, Assistant District Administrator for the Southeast Public Health District, described how intense yet rewarding the pandemic has been for everyone. He said, "Looking back, I am not sure how we were able to accomplish all that we have since the beginning of the pandemic; however, I do know that it would not have been possible without the continued support that we all provided to one another throughout the department. Along with all of the other Alabamians across the state, we too were suffering from the loss of loved ones and the constant worry of our friends and family members who were personally being affected by the virus."

Coordination and cooperation were essential, Odom said. "For months we worked closely with local elected officials, community organizations, state agencies, and municipalities to coordinate and provide COVID-19 testing throughout the district. At times it was not uncommon to test 300-plus individuals in as little as four hours. Throughout those long and hectic days, and even now as we slowly revert to some degree of normalcy, I often speak to our long-time employees who tell me that they have never experienced the level of teamwork and camaraderie amongst their fellow coworkers as they have while responding to this public health emergency. Regardless of the position or classification, it was an 'all for one' push each and every day to set up and provide the needed services to our communities."

Odom explained that on most days, environmentalists, clerks, nutritionists, social workers, district level directors, and administrators worked at testing sites to pre-screen symptomatic

persons who needed to be tested, direct traffic, and assist the clerical staff with completing the necessary forms while performing the data entry process which was extremely important with the execution of the testing and notification process.

"I also do not want to leave out our nurses and nurse practitioners who wrapped themselves in ice packs before donning the full-body Tyvek PPE suits in 95-plus degree temperatures while standing on hot asphalt to collect specimens," Odom said.

As other ADPH employees have expressed, Odom said, "I am very honored to be a part of such a dedicated, selfless and respected team that has risen to the occasion when called to duty. Although it has been a continued up-hill climb, I know that we would do it all over again if needed (but we are going to say that very quietly!)."



***Continued mutual support made the successful response possible. Shown, left to right, are Kyle Odom, assistant district administrator; Sonya McLaney, Office Manager, Coffee County Health Department; Rebecca Peters, Staff Nurse, Coffee County Health Department; Mary Burks, Staff Nurse, Infection Prevention and Control Team; Donna Ross, Clerk, Coffee County Health Department; and Pamela Hill, Nurse Coordinator, Coffee County Health Department.***

# COVID-19 CLINIC VACCINATES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

On April 6, the Montgomery County Health Department held a special drive-through COVID-19 clinic in coordination with Volunteers of America Disabled, East Central District, and the nursing staff of Montgomery County. A caravan transported VOA Disabled residents with intellectual disabilities to get their vaccines. Derrick Bradley and his aunt Sherry Bradley called the clinic and its caring staff “awesome.” The mission of Volunteers of America (VOA) Disabled is to empower people with intellectual disabilities to be independent and involved in their communities. VOA serves individuals with disabilities with specialized programs for autism, age-related problems and other challenges. Hatch said the staff was extremely happy to hold the clinic, and hope they can offer similar clinics in the future.



*Several vans transported individuals to receive COVID-19 vaccine. Derrick Bradley is shown awaiting his vaccination.*



*Assistant District Administrator Tim Hatch and Cheryl Dixon of VOA, left, assist nurse Patty Williamson, nurse manager at Montgomery County Health Department, exit one of the vans after she gave shots at the clinic.*

# GOVERNOR IVEY TOURS MOBILE VACCINATION CLINIC

Governor Kay Ivey is shown giving thumbs up on a visit to tour the Alabama National Guard mobile vaccination clinic in her hometown of Camden in Wilcox County. Governor Ivey, State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Mary McIntyre and Alabama National Guard Adjutant General Sheryl Gordon addressed a joint press conference there on April 2 to make an announcement about the state's COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Eligibility was expanded to include individuals age 16 and older.



# PSA FEATURING COACH NICK SABAN PROMOTES COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

University of Alabama head football coach Nick Saban has taped a public service announcement encouraging vaccinations for COVID-19.

The PSA for broadcast, cable and digital media encourages people to get their COVID-19 vaccinations so that players and fans can safely enjoy loud and full stadiums in 2021. In addition to Coach Saban, the PSA features University of Alabama cheerleaders, the Big Al mascot, cheering fans, and scenes from Bryant-Denny Stadium.



*UA Head Football Coach Nick Saban*

The department appreciates the support of Coach Saban and other notable figures in promoting COVID-19 vaccines. Other state celebrities also plan to record PSAs designed to appeal to a wide range of audiences.

# TALLADEGA SUPERSPEEDWAY PROVIDES LAPS AROUND THE TRACK AS INCENTIVE FOR COVID-19 TESTING/VACCINATION

The public was invited to join the race to end COVID-19 by getting their free COVID-19 test and/or vaccine and then enjoying the exclusive opportunity to drive around the world-famous Talladega Superspeedway.

The event on May 15 was sponsored by the Talladega Superspeedway, the Alabama National Guard, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC Foundation and the department. At this drive-through event, COVID-19 testing and vaccination were offered at no charge. As a special incentive, the track gave people age 16 and older who chose to be tested and/or vaccinated the thrill of driving their car or truck on the 2.66-mile track. Drivers and their riders took two laps behind a pace car at highway speed, including the 33-degree-high banks.

Talladega Superspeedway offered its facilities in partnership with the Increasing Community Access to Testing program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, its testing provider eTrueNorth, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC Foundation and ADPH.



*Drivers line up their vehicles for COVID-19 testing and vaccine administration at the Talladega Superspeedway, which hosted the event and provided the incentives.*



*Alabama National Guard members and Northeastern District staff make preparations to give COVID-19 tests and shots using both Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Helping promote the event was racing great Jeff Gordon who tweeted, "This is very cool! Well done. I hope to see other NASCAR tracks follow your lead."*



*The Race to End COVID event on March 15 drew participants from as far away as Northern Virginia. Northeastern Public Health District employees staffing the event are pictured, left to right: Back: Paula Hopper, Phyllis Coughran, Jennifer Jennings, Mary Gomillion, Front: Kelly Cash, Mark Johnson, Kim HeathADPH*

# TENNESSEE VALLEY'S 2021 REMARKABLE WOMAN AWARD RECIPIENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE THROUGH SERVICE

When Dr. Karen Landers began her public health career in July 1982 as health officer for the three counties of the Northwest Alabama Regional Health Department, she initially expressed her enthusiasm for helping others. In the succeeding decades, her passion for promoting, protecting and improving the health of Alabamians has been unflinching.

Throughout Dr. Landers' public health career, the pediatrician has worked in numerous public health programs that have benefitted both children and adults, such as infant mortality prevention, family health, passenger safety, breastfeeding education, immunization for vaccine-preventable diseases, emergency preparedness, and control of infectious disease outbreaks. She has educated and informed the public about a wide range of public health concerns including H1N1 influenza, HIV, *Legionella*, Ebola and Zika. During emergencies such as devastating and deadly tornadoes, ice storms and critical heat alerts, she has cooperated with others to mitigate injuries and loss of life.

One of her callings is worldwide in scope-tuberculosis control. In August 2018, she volunteered to take on a demanding yet highly rewarding mission to spend several weeks working with the TB+Leprosy Free Majuro Program in the Marshall Islands. She was selected from a large number of applicants to participate in direct patient care and consultation there. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention selected her as US TB Elimination Champion in 2020 and the Medical Advisory Council for Tuberculosis presented her the James H. Baker Exemplar Award in 2018.

All of these experiences helped prepare her for perhaps the greatest challenge in our lifetimes. The COVID-19 pandemic propelled Dr. Landers into a new and critical role through her position in Incident Command as the principal departmental COVID-19 news media spokesperson.

Beginning in January 2020, the scope and scale of the pandemic expanded rapidly. Without a pause, she provided information on contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, prevention methods, testing and vaccinations. In addition to treating COVID-19 patients and advising healthcare providers, Dr. Landers consistently responded to media requests from early morning until late night, seven days a week, to educate the public with the most up-to-date information on COVID-19. These inquiries have come from local, state, national and international media.

The volume of increased media contacts with the department can be clearly verified. For many years, ADPH has subscribed to a video monitoring service which generally

averaged 20 mentions of public health per day pre-pandemic. At the height of the pandemic in January, around 200 mentions of the department were made in a single day. Many of these interviews could be conducted because Dr. Landers made herself available through Zoom and FaceTime calls from her office or even her vehicle. She has also taken to the stage for news conferences and has allowed student reporters to conduct interviews.



When a reporter asked about her personal holiday plans last fall, she responded that she and her family have always served during holidays due to educational, military and career commitments because of the priority of service to others. In recognition of her service, the Nexstar Media Group and WHNT selected Dr. Landers as the 2021 Remarkable Woman from a field of more than 100 nominees.

State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said, "Dr. Landers is a dedicated and compassionate physician who brings a servant's heart to her role as a public health medical officer. She is truly deserving of this recognition."

An honorarium was provided, and Dr. Landers donated the award to the Still Serving Veterans charity. In a message of thanks for her contribution, the Still Serving Veterans President/CEO Paulette M. Risher, Major General, U.S. Army, Retired, praised Dr. Landers for demonstrating "professional competence and leadership - under some truly trying circumstances."

Dr. Landers' other professional honors in public health are almost too numerous to list. They include Award of Excellence, Alabama WIC Program, 2012; Special Recognition, American Academy of Pediatrics, Alabama Chapter, for response during and after tornadoes of April 27, 2011; Honorary Inductee, Alabama Environmental Health Association, 2010; CATCH the Dream 15 years, Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009; Chapter Chairperson's Award, Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999; Community Service Award, WIC Program, 1998; Guy M. Tate Award, 1990, Alabama Public Health Association, 1990; Outstanding Service Award, Mountain Lakes Chapter, Alabama Chapter March of Dimes, 1988.

# MOBILE COUNTY COMMISSION HONORS DR. BERNARD EICHOLD ON A MILESTONE

Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II accepted the position of Health Officer for Mobile County on May 1, 1990. He observed his 31st year at the helm of the Mobile County Health Department May 1.



*Mobile County Health Officer Dr. Bernard Eichold was presented a Commendation of Professional Achievement from the Mobile County Commission.*

In recognition of the anniversary, the Mobile County Commission presented Dr. Eichold with a Commendation of Professional Achievement which stated:

“The Mobile County Commission wishes to applaud Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II on his extraordinary professional achievements on the occasion of his 31st anniversary as Health Officer for the Mobile County Health Department. Furthermore, we extend our congratulations and best wishes to him for continued success.”

Dr. Eichold shared the previous mark for longest tenure in Mobile County with Dr. Otis Leon Chason, who served as Health Officer from 1934 to 1964. Now following research with the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Jefferson County Department of Health, it appears no other health officer in Alabama has ever served as long as Dr. Eichold.

“It has been an honor and a pleasure being the doctor for our community for over 30 years,” Dr. Eichold said. “In that time, we have reduced teenage pregnancy by 40 percent. We have used philanthropic dollars to empower a team of students to work against tobacco use.

“We have worked with churches, industries and individual citizens to improve their personal health, those of their employees and their congregations. We remain the only health department in the state that is both Joint Commission accredited for Ambulatory Health Care and a Federally Qualified Health Center.”

## RETIREES

The following departmental employees have retired recently:

### JANUARY

**Faye Allen**  
Health Provider Standards

**Lucinda Arrant**  
Southwestern District

**Lucinda Ashley**  
General Operations

**Dianne Ashmore**  
Northern District

**Kathi Bailey**  
West Central District

**Michael Boggan**  
Northern District

**Yvonne Brown**  
Health Statistics

**Linda Cantlin**  
Southeastern District

**Dianne Chandler**  
Family Health Services

**Cynthia Daigre**  
Northern District

**Rebecca Dawson**  
Northeastern District

**Tommy Dockery**  
West Central District

**Mary Goodman**  
Northeastern District

**Debra Griffin**  
Prevention, Promotion & Support

**Karen Hope**  
Northeastern District

**Constance King**  
East Central District

**Terrie Lee**  
Southeastern District

**Cynthia Lesinger**  
Immunization

**Pearlie Marshall**  
Southwestern District

**William Martin**  
Family Health Services

**Dora May**  
Southeastern District

**Shelia Oakes**  
Health Statistics

**Patricia Petty**  
Southwestern District

**Pamela Rowan**  
East Central District

**Carolyn Simpson**  
Northern District

**Cyndi Smith**  
Northern District

**Cynthia Taylor**  
CHIP

**Tijuana Tetter**  
HIV Prevention & Care

**Lena Wiggins**  
Northeastern District

**Merita Wiley**  
Southwestern District

### FEBRUARY

**Janet Bush**  
Southwestern District

**Brenda Denard**  
East Central District

**Versie Griffin**  
Southeastern District

**Rosemary Humber**  
Northeastern District

**Terri Jenkins**  
HIV Prevention & Care

**Geraldine Willis**  
West Central District

### MARCH

**Dennis Blair**  
Health Provider Standards

**Lisa Carter**  
Family Health Services

**Karen Crawford**  
West Central District

**Susan Douglass**  
East Central District

**Theresa Gasaway**  
Northern District

**Lynn Green**  
Clinical Laboratories

**June Grier**  
East Central District

**Cheri Hughes**  
Southeastern District

**Guy Nevins**  
Health Care Facilities

**Bridget Reeder**  
HIV Prevention & Care

**Mia Sadler**  
Health Care Facilities

**Amy Shehorn**  
Northern District

**Patricia Webber**  
West Central District

# WINNERS OF 2021 'SHARE YOUR SMILE WITH ALABAMA' COMPETITION PROMOTE GOOD ORAL HEALTH

The Oral Health Office of the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) announced the winners of the fourth annual smile photo contest for third grade students in Alabama, as National Children's Dental Health Month was celebrated during February.

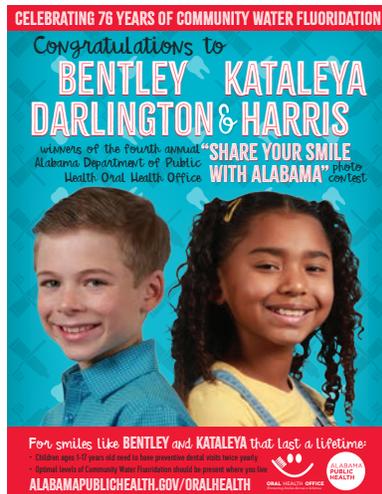
A boy and a girl were selected from photo submissions as the overall winners of the "Share Your Smile with Alabama" campaign for 2021.

Bentley Darlington of Pine Level Elementary School in Autauga County and Kataleya Harris of Gardendale Elementary School in Jefferson County were chosen as the contest winners. The third graders are spotlighted in ADPH marketing campaigns to promote children's oral health in the state.

This year's national campaign slogan was "Water: Nature's Drink!" State Dental Health Director Dr. Tommy Johnson said, "We want to encourage children to drink environmentally friendly tap water that contains fluoride and to develop good oral health habits such as brushing and flossing. In addition, they should eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks and visit their dentist regularly. These habits will help kids develop a lifetime of healthy smiles."

Good oral health is especially important for children. Cavities (also known as caries or tooth decay) are among the most common chronic conditions of children in the United States and is nearly 100 percent preventable. Untreated dental cavities can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning. Children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades than their classmates.

The ADPH Oral Health Office is dedicated to preventing dental disease for Alabama's citizens by promoting and developing quality, cost-effective community and school-based preventive, educational and early treatment programs which emphasize the elimination of oral health disparities.



## COMMENDATIONS

If you would like to praise employees for their accomplishments, send letters of commendation to the State Health Officer or the employee's supervisor and a copy by e-mail to [Arrol.Sheehan@adph.state.al.us](mailto:Arrol.Sheehan@adph.state.al.us) for inclusion in this list. Four items are needed: the employee's name, work unit, name of the person making the commendation, and his or her city and state.

### Tanya Adkins

Tallapoosa County Health Department from Sandra Grubbs Alexander City, Ala.

### LaTicia Hamilton

Center for Health Statistics from Thomas Ross Hallman Tennessee

### Dale County Health Department

from Donna Glass Montgomery, Ala.

### DeAnnbra Peterson

Prevention, Promotion and Support from Ron Condon Atlanta, Ga.

### Melanie Dickens and Coworkers

Lauderdale County Health Department from Janice Cunningham Florence, Ala.

Kerry Holder Joffrion Huntsville, Ala.

Angela Ricketts Address unlisted

### Shayla Santiago

Center for Health Statistics from Mike and Melissa White Hoover, Ala.

### Saundra Gray

Center for Health Statistics from Mike and Melissa White Hoover, Ala.

## TB LABORATORY STAFF RECOGNIZED ON WORLD TB DAY

The Bureau of Clinical Laboratories' TB staff was recognized for ensuring testing in support of the department's TB Program. This laboratory team provides classical microbiology



as well as modern high-quality techniques to perform testing to isolate and identify specimens as TB or "not TB" as well as antimicrobial resistance. Staff members provide support to ADPH's TB Program for rapid and accurate detection of TB and drug resistance as they monitor cases throughout Alabama.

Pictured are (front row) Hannah Putman, Emily Dean, Jennifer Griffin; (back row) Renatta Hale, Stacey Hall (Manager) and Blake Cleckler.

# EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO REDUCE OPIOID DEATHS IN ALABAMA

The Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council is raising awareness about the increased number of opioid overdose deaths in 2020, and state agencies and organizations are combining efforts to reverse the crisis. Opioids are drugs such as heroin, fentanyl and prescription medications like hydrocodone and oxycodone. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an official Health Advisory on December 17, 2020, alerting healthcare professionals of a “substantial increase in drug overdose deaths across the United States, primarily driven by rapid increases in overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, excluding methadone, likely illicitly manufactured fentanyl.” Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is now known to be present in all street drugs, including heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and counterfeit prescription pills.

According to the CDC, there were 81,230 drug overdose deaths in the United States in the 12 months ending May 2020, the largest number ever recorded for a 12-month period. During that period, drug overdoses increased more than 20 percent in Alabama, resulting in the state being one of 25 with the highest increase.

The department supports the collaborative efforts of the Governor’s Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council to develop effective strategies to reverse the opioid crisis in Alabama. State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said, “The crisis of opioid use and addiction reaches all strata of society in significant ways, and the COVID-19 pandemic has created additional challenges. We encourage the friends and families of people with substance use disorders to educate themselves about the lifesaving use of naloxone and to support their loved ones in seeking and receiving care without judgment or blame.”

The ongoing anti-stigma campaign, Stop Judging, Start Healing, initially focused on the public but is now being extended to provide education to healthcare providers. The Pharmacy Division is responsible for the Alabama Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) which includes maintaining the database of dispensed schedule II through V controlled substances in Alabama. Recent improvements to the PDMP make it easier for prescribers to identify those misusing opioids and to motivate those with an opioid abuse disorder to find help for themselves, their families and communities. The number of prescribers accessing PDMP data increased in 2020, which indicates prescribers are increasingly aware of opioid misuse. The council is committed to responding to this acute need to decrease misuse and overdoses in Alabama and raising awareness of the resources that are available to help those with substance use disorders.

In partnership with the Alabama Department of Public Health and [the Alabama Department of Mental Health \(ADMH\)](#), the



Jefferson County Department of Health (JCDH) developed an online training platform for individuals around the state to receive naloxone training and receive a free naloxone kit by mail. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse an opioid overdose. It is available as an easily administered nasal spray (also known as Narcan®) or injection. The training takes less than 15 minutes.

Individuals may access the training on the JCDH website at [www.jcdh.org](http://www.jcdh.org) and search naloxone or Narcan®. Friends and family members of individuals using the substances mentioned above should be educated on the use of naloxone and have naloxone available. People with questions about receiving a free Narcan® kit through JCDH, should email [naloxonetraining@jcdh.org](mailto:naloxonetraining@jcdh.org) or call 205-930-1065.

“The Alabama Department of Mental Health fully encourages the training and use of naloxone to decrease overdose deaths of our loved ones. Too many friends and family members are lost to opioid use disorder. We can help them begin the journey of recovery by educating ourselves about naloxone,”

*continued on page 14*

# THE COST OF COVID-19 IN THE WORKPLACE - LOOKING AFTER YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

We faced many challenges last year in and outside the workplace during the year 2020 due to COVID-19. As we return to normal, we should consider the negative effects that stress can have on employees and the office.

Employees' stress can cause some problems in the following areas:

- Physical health, such as headaches, fatigue, muscle tension, upset stomach and indigestion. In some case, stress can be life threatening.
- Psychological health, including irritability or anger, sadness, lack of energy and motivation. For some, ongoing stress can lead to depression, panic attacks and other psychiatric problems.
- Job performance, including tardiness, absences, mistakes, accidents, poor quality of work, and conflict on the job. It could possibly lead to workplace violence.
- Home and family, such as relationships problems with a spouse or children. This could lead to substance abuse, domestic violence, and divorce.

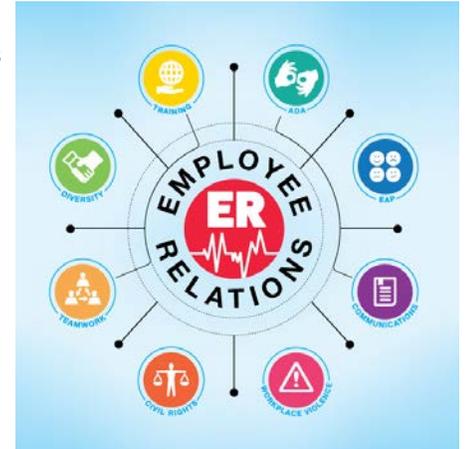
Stress affects how we think, feel and act. It also determines how we relate to each other and how we make a choice in

the workplace and at home. If you feel stress and anxiety daily as we work toward returning to normal at work and socially, please contact Behavioral Health Systems (BHS), Employee Assistance Program. There is no cost to use BHS services. You can call BHS at 1-800-245-1150 or 205-879-1150

Monday – Friday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Central Time. You can also log into the website: [www.behavioralhealthsystems.com](http://www.behavioralhealthsystems.com) and use the password “DORM.” If you have questions, please contact Danita Rose, Employee Relations Officer in the Office of Human Resources, Employee Relations Section, at (334) 206-9494.

*How we handle pressure will determine whether we stand or break. - Ed Hindson*

By DANITA ROSE



## EMPLOYEES TAKE A MENTAL HEALTH DAY BREAK

Employees of the Bureau of Prevention, Promotion, and Support and Alabama National Guard members deployed for the COVID-19 response took an outdoor break May 21 to enjoy

games in the RSA Park. They played games such as corn hole, bocce ball, croquet and had fun hula hooping for respite and to help recharge their mental wellbeing.



# RURAL WATER AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT AWARD WILL PROVIDE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERSERVED, LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

The department has long worked to find solutions to rural wastewater treatment concerns in the Black Belt region, and a \$4.85 million grant to the Consortium for Alabama Rural Water and Wastewater Management will go a long way toward improving public health in areas where the soils have a high clay content and traditional septic tanks are unworkable.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture award will not only help provide alternative wastewater treatment solutions for underserved, low-income communities, but will work to implement them in an achievable and sustainable way. The project's aim is to provide access to safely treated wastewater in rural areas such as the Alabama Black Belt, by training and educating local communities/utilities, and preparing shovel-ready designs.

When the award was announced in March, Sherry Bradley, director of the Bureau of Environmental Services, said, "This is fantastic news, and we want the public to know about this partnership and what it will mean for rural residents of the Black Belt where the soils are impermeable."

The soil of the Alabama Black Belt is dark and rich, but its soil has high concentrations of clay that lead to drainage issues, making traditional onsite wastewater treatment ineffective. In unincorporated low-income areas, some homeowners have resorted to methods such as sending wastewater through a straight pipe from the residence into the woods and where the wastewater goes onto the ground instead of into an approved sewage disposal system. Other residences are using illegally installed systems that are inadequate in soil that does not percolate.

The consortium is led by the University of South Alabama (USA) in partnership with the University of Alabama, Auburn

University, and ADPH. Through the grant, the consortium can establish a technical assistance and training program and develop construction-ready plans for innovative rural wastewater treatment solutions in the Black Belt.

Dr. Kevin White leads the consortium and serves as chair of the Department of Civil, Coastal, and Environmental Engineering at USA. The consortium's goal is to ensure that innovative solutions are identified, and a more resilient and sustainable wastewater infrastructure is constructed throughout the region.

The infrastructure award will allow for

- Broader training and guidance
- Community outreach, such as performing county needs assessments
- Exploration of innovative wastewater solutions for rural areas that include evaluating and testing wastewater treatment options
- Defining workable funding mechanisms
- Developing technical, management and regulatory direction
- Economic development in underserved communities
- Improved public health and quality of life

At select pilot sites, the project will install and test new clustered and decentralized wastewater treatment systems. These systems will connect neighboring infrastructure in a single system that will collect, treat and reuse water. This will not only reduce the cost of maintaining the systems, it will provide a model that could eventually be deployed throughout the state.

## ***Opioids, continued from page 12***

said Commissioner Kim Boswell, ADMH and Co-chair of the Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council.

"The opioid crisis has caused tremendous suffering for its victims in Alabama, which has intensified with the unprecedented challenges of this past year," said Attorney General Steve Marshall. "More than ever, it is important that we face this problem effectively, focusing not on shame and stigma, but on prevention, treatment and healing. We need to make people aware of the dangers, because knowledge brings power, and we need to provide tools that will save lives. That

is why we want people with vulnerable loved ones to know how to get naloxone and use it in cases of overdose. If you or someone you know is struggling with opioids, please find out what assistance is available and ask for help."

Help is available for those struggling with substance use through a free 24/7 substance use helpline at 1-844-307-1760. This is a statewide service sponsored by the ADMH and staffed by peer recovery support specialists from the Recovery Organization of Support Specialists to help individuals navigate treatment and recovery systems.

# ALABAMA FAMILY CENTRAL WEBSITE PROVIDES CONNECTIONS TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Alabama Family Central website is a free, comprehensive, easy-to-use website with mobile access that offers parents and caregivers, families, and teachers a one-stop connection to programs and services in Alabama. Programs, tools and information on child care, education, family services and health services can all be found on the site.

“Alabama Family Central will assist Alabama citizens to continue to build strong healthy families by ensuring parents and children in our state have access to crucial information and resources from numerous state agencies, service providers and non-profit organizations,” Governor Kay Ivey said. “Great parents need strong partners. I thank the state agencies and other partners for this wonderful new resource.”

The site highlights relevant and timely resources to address the needs of families. Child care listings, county health departments, other health services, education resources, and many more are found easily on the site.

To address a need identified by the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, this site was collaboratively created by state agencies and other partners to support Alabama families as a compilation

and link to available resources that can assist with issues related to the health and well-being of children and families. The Alabama Legislature supported this effort with \$500,000 in funding from the fiscal year 2021 Education Trust Fund budget.

Information about the site is communicated on agency partner websites, the Alabama Family Central Facebook page, online videos, radio, and billboards throughout the state.

Along with the department, the Alabama Family Central website is a collaboration managed by the Alabama Partnership for Children and includes: Office of the Governor of Alabama, A+ Education Partnership, Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, Alabama Department of Education, Alabama Department of Human Resources, Alabama Department of Mental Health, Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Alabama Medicaid, Alabama Office of Information Technology.

Questions or comments from the public may be addressed to [contactfamilycentral@apcteam.org](mailto:contactfamilycentral@apcteam.org) at Alabama Family Partnership or (334) 271-0304.

## SCHOOL SYSTEM RECOGNIZES COVID-19 VACCINATION CLINIC WORKERS

Florence City Schools Superintendent Dr. Jimmy Shaw and other representatives expressed gratitude to volunteers and healthcare

workers in Lauderdale County by delivering bags of goodies to the health department and the North Alabama Medical Center.



# JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION FROM HRSA AND NACCHO

Two innovative projects and a program of the Jefferson County Department of Health have been recognized nationally.

The Health Resources and Services Administration awarded a \$10,000 cash prize for the Jefferson County Department of Health's *Child well-visit and immunizations project* which was among 50 [Phase 1 Winners](#) of the [HRSA MCHB's Promoting Pediatric Primary Prevention \(P4\) Challenge](#). This means the project will move forward to Phase 2 of the Challenge. The Maternal and Child Health Bureau received more than 240 submissions from teams across the nation, including nearly 200 cities, 44 states and Puerto Rico.

The *Overdose 2 Action project* (focused on online naloxone training) was selected as an "Innovative Practice Gold Awardee" for the 2021 National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Innovative Practice Award. The designation of this program as a Gold Innovative Practice "demonstrates the highest level of program innovation to meet the needs of your community during the COVID-19 pandemic."

The *Public safety personnel COVID-19 testing program* of the Jefferson County Department of Health was selected as an Honorable Mention for the 2021 NACCHO Innovative Practice Award. The designation of this program as an Honorable Mention Practice "demonstrates a high level of program innovation to meet the needs of your community during the COVID-19 pandemic."

## CALENDAR

### AUGUST 6

**Women's Health During the Pandemic: A Focus on Resilience  
Thirteenth Annual Women's Health Update**

Sponsored by the Office of Women's Health Advisory Committee.

### SEPTEMBER 9

**Strengthening Communities:**

**Tools to Promote Better Birth Outcomes**

**Fourth Annual Infant Mortality Awareness Summit**

Live virtual summit sponsored by ADPH, Gift of Life Foundation, Inc., and Birmingham Healthy Start Plus

### SPRING 2022 (DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED)

**The Then and Now of Public Health**

63rd Alabama Public Health Association Education Conference

# IN MEMORIAM RUTH HARRELL, M.P.H., B.S.N.

Longtime public health leader, energetic advocate, and former Public Health Nursing Director Ruth Harrell passed away December 31 at her home in Flomaton. Mrs. Harrell retired from the department in 1998, but not from public health.



From her days as a staff nurse with the Conecuh County Health Department and throughout her 60-year nursing career, she worked tirelessly and effectively on behalf of healthcare causes. A beloved leader who was state nursing director from 1987 to 1993, Mrs. Harrell held many posts and served on task forces and committees at the local, state and national levels.

For decades, Mrs. Harrell served in numerous leadership positions with the Alabama Public Health Association, and the association created the Ruth Harrell Nursing Scholarship in her honor. This was especially fitting because she inspired many students to enter the nursing profession and served as a mentor to others in public health. She was a two-term past president of both the Alabama State Nurses' Association and the nonprofit advocacy group, VOICES for Alabama's Children, and was president of the Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing among many other leadership and advisory roles.

Among her professional awards, Mrs. Harrell was inducted into the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame, the Alabama Nursing Hall of Fame, and the Alabama Public Health Association Hall of Fame. She was elected employee representative on the Alabama State Personnel Board where she served for nine years. In 2008, she was honored by her alma mater as the University of Alabama in Birmingham School of Public Health's Alumnus of the Year.

Active in rural health concerns, especially in improving access to medical care, she helped establish schools of osteopathy in Alabama, chaired the Coalition for a Healthier Escambia County, and participated in many faith-based and volunteer activities in her community. Her passion and zeal for improving and advancing public health will be greatly missed.